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ABSTRACT

Guidelines are offered for creating content-based, English-language instructional units for a first-year introductory art history course at an international college. The guidelines are meant to help Japanese students at a low level of English proficiency in a course being taught by a native-English-speaking professor. curriculum focused on development of knowledge about art history while fostering information processing, critical thinking, and meaningful communication skills. The first step is to determine objectives for both art history and language skill development, by identifying key content-area ideas and concepts and analyzing texts used in the discipline. Instructional materials are then sequenced, linking content assignments closely to language exercises. Activities are also designed to balance an academic focus with affective objectives, including responsiveness to art and self-expression. Activities found to engage and maintain student interest include jigsaws, paired dictation, paired questions, and role-playing. Repeating activities in different units, structuring assignments to focus student attention, linking abstract to concrete with visual aids, incorporating multiple media, linking curriculum to current events, encouraging students to contribute personal knowledge to the curriculum, allowing student needs and interests to surface, and constant monitoring of student progress are also found to be effective techniques. (MSE)

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Integrating ESL into the Art History Classroom

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Introduction

Content-based English classes can provide a meaningful context for the acquisition and development of English language skills. This paper provides guidelines for creating content-based units for a first-year introductory art history course at an international college. Two ESL instructors were asked to provide English language materials to help Japanese students at a low level of English proficiency in a course being taught by a native-English-speaking professor. The goals were to help the students master and reinforce their knowledge of art history concepts while simultaneously helping them build their vocabulary and develop the skills to process information, think critically, and communicate meaningfully in speaking and writing. The instructors wanted to help the students succeed in their art history course and yet also provide them with activities and experiences useful in developing language, academic, and study skills transferable to future courses. In teaching the course, several useful principles emerged which are discussed below.

Guidelines for Creating Content-Based Units

Course Objectives

First of all, it was important to determine both art history objectives and language objectives by

a) identifying ideas and concepts in the art history material and planning ways to help students process the material. For example, one of the most important concepts in art history was the idea of change over time. Texts and lectures continually emphasized contrasts between art from one period with that of a later period (Greek vs. Roman, Romanesque vs. Gothic, etc.). Therefore, one objective was to teach students terms of comparison and contrast and how to write paragraphs comparing and contrasting specific buildings (such as the Parthenon and the Pantheon) and paintings (such as "The Creation of Adam" and "The Last Judgment" in the Sistine Chapel).

b) analyzing texts used in the discipline for language features such as commonly-occurring grammatical patterns and structures. In this case, the instructors found that art history texts are full of passive structures, relative clauses (used in descriptions of art), and adjective/noun complements containing the language of judgment ("She considered the painting beautiful."). Therefore, one objective of the course was to help the students understand and use language containing these grammatical features.

Next, it was important to sequence the instructional material and plan ways to implement the unit. In this case, the units mirrored those of the content teacher – Egyptian art, Greek, Roman, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, Neo-Classicism,

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Impressionism, etc. For motivational purposes, the instructors linked activities and assignments as closely as possible to assignments made by the art history instructor. When students saw a clear relationship, they were more likely to perceive ESL assignments as relevant to their needs. Since the art history professor required the students to take essay tests at the end of each unit, writing assignments by ESL instructors were also seen as valuable learning activities.

However, it was a good idea to balance the above principle with the provision of activities which helped students develop transferable skills. The content and ESL instructors spent equal amounts of class time with the students, but it was not possible to utilize all of the content material covered in ESL activities. Using activities which emphasized the development of general language skills that would be needed in other courses as well seemed the best use of time.

Also, balancing activities with an academic focus with those which encouraged students to enjoy and react to art and express their ideas and opinions informally strengthened the effectiveness of the course as a whole. The instructors usually tried to provide a communicative purpose for listening, reading, writing, speaking, and using particular vocabulary or grammatical structures. Such activities were the basis for heightened motivation in the class at large. Art in particular often evokes an emotional response which can be capitalized upon in encouraging students to communicate both orally and in writing. For example, a simple but effective method of introducing students to art history was to have them examine portraits from various time periods on the first day. Students then had their own "portraits" taken with a Polaroid and spent time describing them both orally and in writing using newly acquired vocabulary such as "profile."

Maintaining and Raising Student Interest to Facilitate Active Learning

In the art history course, several important guidelines emerged which proved valuable in helping to increase student motivation and mastery of the material:

The instructors discovered that it was effective to plan experiential language learning activities based on the course material in which students had to interact with each other to negotiate meaning. This gave the students an active role in their course instead of the passive one that sometimes exists in a lecture-based, college class. Activities which proved particularly successful in the art history course were jigsaws, pair dictations, paired questions, and role plays, including mock interviews. Below is a brief description of each.

- *Jigsaw*

In a jigsaw, students are divided into groups. Each student in a group is then sent off to learn a set amount of information in a different group which he/she must then come back and share with the other members in the original group. The group is then tested over the complete set of information the students have shared with each other.

- *Pair Dictation*

In a pair dictation, two students have incomplete copies of a written text. Each has the information the other needs to complete the text. They take turns dictating to each other. They can then use the completed information as a reading text, process the information, and use it in a follow-up activity.

- *Paired Questions*

With paired questions, one student is provided with only the first half of a text and a list of questions about the second half while the other student is given the second half of the text and a list of questions about the first half. The students take turns answering the questions of the other so that eventually each student has all the salient information.

- *Role Plays*

In role plays, students take on the roles of artists or of people from societies of the period being studied (for example, a medieval king, merchants in the cathedral town of Chartres, a priest, and the pilgrims traveling to the cathedral). As students interact with each other, they are able to consolidate their knowledge of a period of art.

Recycling activities also proved effective. Repeating the same types of activities in different units helped students to feel comfortable. Once they knew how to do an activity, they were at ease and could concentrate on the new language and concepts they were trying to learn. In this case, the instructors developed the same kinds of jigsaws, pair dictations, and other activities which seemed to be effective at several different times for various units in the course.

Thirdly, for learners in the earlier stages of proficiency, the instructors realized that it was important to structure and focus the assignments as completely as possible. It was essential to remember not to expect students to engage in free discussions of topics without first providing them with the vocabulary, structures, and background knowlege necessary to do so. Often a guided activity such as a pair dictation could serve as a means for listening and speaking more effectively than a free discussion to which lower level students would have had difficulty contributing. Likewise, limiting the content freed students to focus on important concepts. For example, in the Renaissance unit, the instructors chose a short reading which discussed only two paintings in the Sistine Chapel, "The Creation of Adam" and "The Last Judgment." More general concepts regarding history and society were then drawn by looking specifically at these two paintings. In general, the students in the class were able to open up and participate more when the assignments were structured and focused as specifically as possible.

Linking the abstract to the concrete with visuals and incorporating as many different multimedia resources as possible into the curriculum was also a valuable guideline. The instructors tried to expose students to the same ideas several times in as many different forms as possible. Art history lends itself naturally to this. By its very nature, it is rich in visual imagery, and relevant slides, CD-Roms, the Internet,

videos, and music could easily be found. Popular activities in the class included surfing the Internet for information about Renaissance artists and compiling it in a chart generated in Microsoft Word and a video with a song from a musical entitled "Sunday in the Park with George" in which the characters in a painting come to life and begin complaining to their painter about being stuck in such uncomfortable poses. Watching the video served as a basis for expansion to other, related, language activities such as pretending to pose the students in a painting and discussing what this felt like, a pair dictation with background information, a cloze activity while listening to the song, and an inferencing activity in which students compared who said what in the song and thus were able to infer who was who in the painting.

Linking the curriculum to current events also proved effective in getting students interested in the subject. At the very beginning of the course, articles and news clips about the finding of some ancient cave paintings in France were prominent in the news, so these were incorporated into the class and generated a high level of interest.

Another useful principle was to encourage students to contribute to the curriculum. In one unit, the art history professor had been explaining the influence of Japanese woodblock prints on Impressionism, and when an enterprising student showed the instructors a website for the Ukiyoe (Woodblock Print) Museum in Nagoya which he had come across while surfing, they utilized it in the next class in a skimming/scanning activity.

It was also important to allow student needs and interests to surface. For one assignment, students were encouraged to choose a work from the later Neo-Classic or Impressionist periods, but one student was particularly taken with a Renaissance painting which he had studied in high school as well. Since he seemed so fascinated with it, the assignment was modified to include works from earlier time periods.

Finally, it was important to plan for evaluation of learning. Such assessment did not necessarily have to be formal, but the instructors constantly monitored for feedback which allowed them to see what their students had learned successfully. Students also benefited when they could see they were making progress in concrete ways. This particular course culminated in the completion of a collaborative class project, a tangible expression of what the students had learned. Near the end of the art history course, each student chose a slide for an oral report or mini-lecture to the rest of the class. Students were encouraged to use structures which had been emphasized, such as passives and relative clauses. After the reports, each student wrote a written summary which became the basis of a news article in a student-produced newspaper called *The Art History Times*.

Conclusion

The curriculum evolved over the course of the semester as the instructors strove to develop a curriculum based on the students' needs and interests in a particular course. Art history proved a particulary rich and fertile subject which was easily exploitable for language learning purposes. However, the guidelines stated above

could be applied in creating content-based courses for other disciplines or subjects as well.

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